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ABSTRACT

The quality standards by which graduate programs leading to a Master's degree may be judged are presented. Major emphasis is on the Master of Arts (M.A.) and Master of Science (M.Sc.) degree programs with a few of the more widely-used professional degrees, such as Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.), Master of Education (M.Ed.), and Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.) also being discussed. Summaries are provided on the history of the master's program, the responsibility of the institution for providing quality education, the organization of graduate work, the nature and types of master's degrees, master's degree titles, guidelines for the evaluation of programs, goals and objectives, program characteristics, the composition of the faculty, other faculty resources, and graduate students, and the physical facilities. (SPG)

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THE MASTER'S DEGREE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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A POLICY STATEMENT

The Council of Graduate Schools in the United States

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FOREWORD

This statement, to which many individuals have contributed, is intended to set forth the quality standards by which graduate programs leading to Master's degrees may be judged.

The major emphasis is on Master of Arts (M.A.) and Master of Science (M.Sc.) degree programs. A few of the more widely used professional degrees, such as Master of Business Administration, (M.B.A.), Master of Education (M.Ed.), and Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.) are also discussed.

What is presented here is endorsed and published by the officers and Executive Committee of the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States.

J. Boyd Page
President

The Master's degree has a long and interesting history that stretches back for nearly a thousand years. The degree conveyed the right to teach from early in the thirteenth century, and in the Middle Ages the titles of doctor, master, and professor were synonymous. The title master and doctor became degrees in time and became honorary distinctions.

In early America, the degree of Master was highly respected as a measure of academic achievement. It lost prestige, however, as over the years it ceased to be an earned degree and was awarded to anyone who applied even two or three years after the baccalaureate.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, education reformers laid the ground work for graduate study as it is known today. The degree *in cursu* was replaced by the degree *pro meritus* and the Master's degree once again was recognized as a prestigious academic award for the successful completion of substantial post-baccalaureate study in a chosen branch of knowledge.

In recent years, the number of Master's degrees awarded in the United States has increased at a rate even faster than the increase in the number of Bachelor's degrees awarded. The variety of Master's degrees has proliferated so rapidly it is difficult to generalize about the level of achievement represented or the needs they are designed to serve. Nevertheless, some guidelines can be drawn to assist institutions beginning or developing graduate schools and to inform the public interested in the continued well-being of higher education.

Master's programs are intended to answer the personal needs of the student and the special needs of society that are not satisfied by a Baccalaureate program — needs that can only be met by more advanced and specialized study in a particular field. Candidates need such programs to prepare for scholarly or professional careers or perhaps merely to slake a thirst for further knowledge. Society, in turn, has a need for scholars, scientists, teachers, and professionals in a multitude of fields, and for generally well-educated men and women whatever their walks of life.

Broadly speaking, the Master's degree indicates that the holder has mastered a program in a particular field sufficiently to pursue creative projects in that specialty. In some areas, it may be a prerequisite for further study toward a more advanced degree such as the doctorate. The degree should be awarded for completion of a coherent program designed to assure the mastery of specified knowledge and skills, rather than for the random accumu-

lation of a certain number of course credits after attaining the baccalaureate.

The Responsibility for Quality

The institution offering the Master's degree assumes a responsibility to the public to establish and maintain excellence in the education of its students. Programs recognized for their eminence exist in all fields and may serve as guides for those newly proposed.

Graduate schools of high quality demand the investment of additional resources beyond those normally required for the undergraduate curriculum. Although the investment an institution makes in establishing and maintaining eminent programs is substantial, the costs can be justified by the great potential benefits accruing to students and society.

A college or university should initiate a Master's degree program only when demonstrable need exists and when the institution's resources and special traditions insure it can provide a program of merit.

The Organization of Graduate Work

Introduction of even a few Master's programs requires the establishment of a separate organization within the university to handle effectively the new academic responsibilities and the new administrative procedures required and to insure the maintenance of reasonably uniform standards. A pattern which has developed in this country and which now prevails at many institutions is based upon the appointment of a graduate faculty, academically responsible for all graduate programs, chosen from within the total faculty, led by and responsible to a graduate dean.

At most institutions with a substantial number of graduate programs, new members are usually elected by the graduate faculty or appointed by the graduate dean upon recommendation by committees of the graduate faculty. Professors normally hold appointments in undergraduate colleges and schools, but usually only those engaged in graduate instruction and research are eligible for membership in the graduate faculty. Through appropriate committees, the graduate faculty and the graduate dean develop general policies and administrative procedures for the graduate programs. As the principal executive officer, the graduate dean should be a recognized scholar or expert in a specific field, have experience in graduate education,

and be accepted as a peer by the graduate faculty.

The graduate dean must be administratively responsible for: 1) approval of new degree programs, 2) admission of students, and 3) recommendation of degree recipients. Other functions normally the responsibility of the graduate dean are promotion of program quality and monitoring of student progress, maintenance of academic records, allocation of student financial aid, and support of faculty research. Frequently, the dean also is active in administrative supervision of sponsored research where this is supportive of graduate education.

Nature of Master's Degrees

The Master's degree is customarily awarded to an aspirant who achieves a level of academic accomplishment substantially beyond that required for the Baccalaureate degree. The Master's program should consist of a coherent pattern of courses frequently capped by comprehensive examinations and a thesis or its equivalent in a creative project. Ideally, all Master's programs should include an opportunity for the student to learn to present information in written and oral form to a variety of audiences. Whatever their career objectives may be, students are certain to be called upon to communicate effectively. A carefully supervised teaching experience can be invaluable preparation for those who will engage in programs of instruction formal or informal.

The scope of knowledge today is so complex and is growing so rapidly that the mature scholar as well as the graduate student must select a particular field and, almost certainly, a specialty within that field in order to make an effective contribution. Thus for example, Master's programs are offered in a wide variety and large number of fields such as anthropology, botany, business administration, chemistry, English, history, mathematics, physics, sociology, and a number of sub-specialties within many disciplines. A program may be offered by a department specializing in the particular field, or sometimes, if the program is interdisciplinary, by a specifically authorized committee or group of professors, each of whom is competent in the particular field or closely related ones.

Types of Master's Degrees

There are two principal types of Master's programs. One type leads to the academic degrees *Master of Arts* (M.A.) or *Master of Science* (M.S.). These programs provide an

introduction to scholarly activities and research and often serve as preparation for teaching careers in public schools, community colleges, and in some disciplines in colleges and universities. Study at this level is often an intermediate step for those seeking the Doctor of Philosophy degree. The M.A. and the M.S. degrees make up over half the Master's conferred in the United States. Programs leading to these two degrees are very similar in their objectives and their nature; traditionally, the M.A. is awarded in all fields but especially in the arts, letters, and humanities, while the M.S. is generally awarded in the sciences, engineering and agriculture.

The second type of programs leads to *professional Master's degrees*. These provide instruction in professional affairs and often serve as preparation for careers in those professions. The names used to designate the professional degree are often stated as *"Master of* _____ (Professional Field)."

The Master of Education is the most frequently awarded degree of this type. Similar degrees awarded by institutions in this country include the Master of Business Administration, Master of Music, Master of Fine Arts, Master of Music Education, Master of Theology, Master of Laws, Master of Architecture, Master of Engineering, and Master of Public Health. These more commonly awarded professional Master's degrees together with the M.A. and M.S. degrees account for most of the Master's degrees awarded each year. Programs leading to the degree of Master in professional fields are generally similar to those leading to the degree of Master of Arts or Master of Science except that they emphasize professional affairs and practice. In a few fields, the professional degree is a prerequisite for a license.

Although not available for all professional Master's programs, some descriptions which provide standards for program accreditation by professional organizations are available from such organizations as the following:

The Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.) and Other Degrees.

American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) Accreditation Council: *Policies, Procedures and Standards*, 1974, 760 Office Parkway, Suite 50, St. Louis, Missouri, 63141.

The Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.) and Other Art Degrees

National Association of Schools of Art (NASA), *The*

Bulletin, Revised August, 1973, 11250 Roger Bacon Drive, Reston, Virginia, 22090.

The Master of Music (M.M.) and Other Music Degrees
National Association of Schools of Music: *STANDARDS for Undergraduate Degrees and RECOMMENDATIONS for Graduate Programs*, November, 1973, 11250 Roger Bacon Drive, No. 5, Reston, Virginia, 22090.

The Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
Council on Social Work Education: *Manual of Standards of Commission on Accreditation*, November, 1968, 345 East 46th Street, New York, New York, 10017.

The Master of Public Administration (M.P.A.)
Guidelines and Standards for Professional Master's Degree Programs in Public Affairs/Public Administration, National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, 1225 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C., 20036.

The Master of Education (M. Ed.)
and Other Education Degrees
National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 1750 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C., 20036.

In addition, regional and state accreditation standards and reviews must be observed.

Some institutions have developed innovative Master's degree programs specifically designed to satisfy the needs or desires of individual students or occasionally groups of students. These programs are often interdepartmental in nature and are supervised by faculty groups cutting across the normal lines of institutional academic structure.

Finally, a few institutions award a Master's degree which is not a Master's degree at all in the sense defined above. This is the Master of Philosophy degree which is awarded to an official candidate for the Ph.D. who has satisfied all requirements for the doctorate except writing and defending an acceptable dissertation. The M. Phil. represents at least two years of full-time course work plus comprehensive examinations much more intensive and extensive than those normally required for any Master's degree. Informally, the equivalent level of study and achievement is often referred to as "A.B.D." (All But Dissertation).

Master's Degree Titles

In addition to the titles previously mentioned, the more common variations are modifications of the M.A. and the M.S. — e.g., Master of Arts in Teaching, Master of Science in Electrical Engineering. More than three hundred different titles are used for Master's degrees which fall essentially into these categories.

In an attempt to reduce the number of these degrees and to avoid confusion as to the level of academic achievement attained, it is highly recommended that:

(i) the M.A. and the M.S. WITHOUT FURTHER DESIGNATION be the degrees awarded for completion of scholarly research and subject-teaching oriented Master's programs; and that the Master of Education, the Master of Business Administration, the Master of Music, etc., be the degrees for completion of professionally oriented programs;

(ii) for Master's degrees otherwise titled, the transcript of a graduate student's record be consulted to determine the exact nature of the program completed, and whether the graduate is qualified for more advanced work or for employment;

(iii) the number of names used for Master's degrees and speciality designations be held to an absolute minimum.

Guidelines for the Evaluation of Programs

The following guidelines are provided to aid institutions in assessing existing programs and evaluating proposals for new ones. There are many factors that must be considered, but only the most important will be discussed here.

The first step is to determine why the degree program should be initiated or continued. The academic unit responsible should submit a detailed proposal outlining the evident need and answering such questions as: Is the faculty adequate? Are there enough potential students interested in the program? Is there a need for more personnel trained in the field as researchers, teachers, or practitioners? Is there a valid intellectual need for the program? Are resources, such as full-time faculty and library facilities adequate, i.e., significantly beyond the needs of the baccalaureate program? As part of this determination of need, consideration must be given to the existence of

similar programs at neighboring institutions. Substantial, preferably unique, reasons should exist for establishing a new program; otherwise, consortia or cooperative arrangements should be sought as possible alternatives.

Before embarking on a program, a clear need should be recognized by all concerned. A program of high quality can exist only if the faculty, administration, and governing boards believe in it wholeheartedly and provide adequately for its success. New positions should be created if needed. Support should be provided for graduate students and staff, and the necessary academic facilities provided.

Goals and Objectives

After the need has been established, the goals and objectives of the proposed program should be written in specific terms mindful of the general role and plans for long-term development of the institution as a whole. If the proposed program is initiated, the statement of goals and objectives should be included in the graduate bulletin or catalog and in departmental brochures.

The statement is useful in a reassessment of a program; a procedure recommended after a period of three to five years of operation. Questions that should be asked are: a) does the program meet the intended objectives, b) are changed objectives in response to new conditions in order, c) are enrollments and other goals being reasonably attained? Answers to these and similar questions will influence decisions about the continuation or elimination of the program and about the level of support needed in the future.

Program Characteristics

The proposed program should encompass a reasonably well-defined and recognized area of advanced study for which there exist library and laboratory facilities to enable the student to do substantive research.

The Master's program consists of a pre-planned and coherent sequence of lectures, seminars, discussions, and independent studies or investigations, designed to give the student the opportunity to learn from original sources in the library, from studies conducted in the laboratory, through creative scholarship (whether research or professionally oriented), and through research or professional practice in the field. Courses offered for credit toward a graduate degree program must have the approval of the

faculty body vested with that authority. Experience has shown that to maintain these program characteristics, most of the course work should be offered by resident graduate faculty. Recognizing that individual students at the beginning graduate level will have had various occupational and educational experiences, it is reasonable that there be different course and seminar requirements for different students in the program. Admission is normally limited to baccalaureate degree holders from accredited institutions who have maintained a specified grade-point average. For other criteria see the section on "The Graduate Students" which follows. It is essential that admission application materials be screened as early as possible and an admission decision be formally communicated to the applicant. Completion of the program should require one to two years of full-time study or its equivalent beyond the Bachelor's degree.

Many of the benefits to a student in graduate education come from day-to-day informal exchanges of ideas, opinions, and information between faculty and students and among students themselves. These benefits are enhanced by a period of study on campus as a student in full-time residence. Many institutions thus have a stated residence requirement to ensure that all students are exposed to this aspect of graduate education.

Master's degree programs which are offered more or less exclusively through extension or off-campus instruction do not have some of the advantages of study on campus unless departments carefully supervise the work done to assure that it is of equivalent quality to that done in residence. Even so, that personal contact and interchange within the department or program which provides the other intangible dimension characteristic of quality graduate education is lost; and this can be compensated for only by providing special characteristics as a part of the program. Although serving many useful purposes, correspondence study should not constitute a significant part of Master's degree programs.

Most colleges or universities require completion of a Master's degree program within four to five years after the first post-baccalaureate enrollment. Course work beyond five years should not normally be accepted without clear evidence of the candidate's maintenance of reasonably current knowledge of the material covered in the out-of-date work.

The student should have command of the appropriate scholarly tools or basic skills needed prior to entry into

the program or should obtain them during the initial term of study. Faculty supervision and monitoring of these matters is essential during admission and advising procedures. Academic credits in the program should not be given for courses which are remedial or designed to fulfill prerequisites for admission.

A thesis has been a requirement for the Master's degree since its inception and has traditionally been a modest contribution to knowledge, certainly original to the student, and it may be original to the field. Although the thesis is not now a requirement in many Master's programs, a component demonstrating creativity should be required in quality programs. A thesis or its equivalent, a report of an internship, a case study, the organization and conduction of an advanced seminar, a music recital, a gallery showing of the student's works of art, the presentation of a play, and the reading of original poetry all contain elements desired in quality Master's degree programs.

The student's progress should be monitored periodically to insure that satisfactory work is being done and to give the faculty an opportunity to provide guidance. A comprehensive examination, which covers the field to be mastered, is required by many institutions. In those programs in which a thesis or a series of written reports is required, there should be an oral presentation and defense of the work submitted.

The Faculty

The quality of the faculty is of central importance in the establishment of a sound program. Each participating faculty member should have a command of the field and have demonstrated a capacity for teaching and research or professional practice. Such a teacher has usually earned the highest degree in the field or has its equivalent in scholarly achievement.

It is important that professors have different specializations in order to expose the student to several points of view and to staff the committees which supervise or examine the student. Generally, several related Master's programs should be offered so that faculty of each may contribute to and gain strength and stimulation from the others.

Before relying on visiting or adjunct faculty, careful attention must be given to their familiarization with the objectives and requirements of the university as well as

the specific program. Ready accessibility of such faculty to the student at certain critical points should be assured.

Provision must be made for the needs of the professional staff. Faculty should receive salaries commensurate with the importance of their contributions. Faculty also should carry only a moderate load of formal courses to allow more preparation time for graduate seminars and laboratories and the more frequent one-to-one student-faculty contacts characteristic of graduate, as opposed to undergraduate, instruction. The number of graduate students being directed by an individual faculty member should be be kept small. Adequate time must be allowed to permit professors to keep informed and current with developments of their disciplines.

Other Faculty Resources

Each faculty member also needs adequate office space for study, for research, and for individual conferences with students. Special funds for scholarly activity or research should be made available. Funds may be needed for such purposes as the purchase of microfilm, secretarial or technical skills, computer time, special travel, etc. Sabbatical and professional leave programs are particularly important for faculty to maintain scholarly interests and develop research programs.

The Graduate Students

Students admitted into programs leading to the Master's degree, whether research or practice oriented, should show evidence of superior ability, achievement, and motivation. Admission should generally be limited to holders of baccalaureate degrees from accredited institutions.

For students from non-U.S. universities, great care should be exercised to insure that previous study has been of such quality and scope as to insure adequate preparation for the study to be undertaken. Language competency and facility should be demonstrated before admission is granted. Usually an acceptable TOEFL* or equivalent score is the minimum requirement. Various measures of ability should be considered in the screening process. They could include the Graduate Record Examinations or other tests, previous academic work, faculty recommendations,

*TOEFL is the Test of English as a Foreign Language, administered frequently, world wide, by the Educational Testing Service.

a portfolio of previous professional work, personal statements of the students or interviewers. Ordinarily such measures will be used in combination and final judgment arrived at accordingly, rather than on the basis of a single criterion (e.g., test scores). The student should be given official notification of the admission decision as soon as possible.

Early in each student's studies, a faculty adviser should be assigned who is active in the program. Later, a small committee of faculty (three or four members) should be appointed to supervise the research and certify the successful completion of program requirements to the dean and graduate faculty.

To assure adequate opportunity for highly qualified students, a Master's program should have available a sufficient number of scholarship, fellowship, assistantship and loan-fund awards. A graduate *scholarship* or *fellowship* is a grant made to aid a student in carrying forward a program of graduate study. The *teaching assistantship*, whereby the Master's student provides part-time assistance to a professor in teaching a class, is often a very useful arrangement since a stipend is provided as well as valuable experience in relation to college and university teaching. All teaching assistants should be given advice, guidance, and close supervision by experienced professors. The extent of their service should be limited so that it does not substantially retard their progress toward completion of their Master's degrees. The *research assistantship* permits the Master's student to give part-time assistance to or act in collaboration with a professor in the conduct of research which may be used as a basis for thesis research.

The Physical Facilities

All Master's degree programs require adequate classrooms, seminar rooms, offices, and library study carrels. The library should, of course, contain more extensive materials than are usually present in an undergraduate library. Computer facilities should be available as well as scientific laboratories, art or music studios, theatres, operating facilities for practicums, and adequate supplies for operation of all such facilities.

CONCLUSION

This statement has been designed to encourage an improvement in the quality of Master's degree programs

through greater understanding of the nature of such programs. The Council of Graduate Schools in the United States offers a consultation service through which academic persons with wide knowledge of and experience with Master's programs may be identified and invited to visit a college or university to provide assistance on a confidential basis with the development of programs or other matters pertaining to Master's work.

The Council of Graduate Schools in the United States has a Standing Committee on the Master's degree, and its members welcome any inquiries and suggestions.

For information concerning this publication or other assistance available, write to the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States, One Dupont Circle, N.W., Suite 740, Washington, D.C. 20036 or telephone (202) 223-3791.